

CONSERVATION CONGRESS REGIONAL MEETING

John A. Logan Community College – Carterville, IL

February 20, 2013

Extraction –

- Switch priorities on regulation – more protection, less on extraction
- Geologic Survey – investigate training opportunities for staff, stay current with trends, support continuing education
- Worth investigating – Oklahoma adjusted income tax due to the royalties from exports of extractive resources
- Permitting processes are lengthy – not enough qualified staff to handle the load
- Research fees that would be dedicated to Office of Mines and Minerals – money goes back to process, ex: so many dollars/ton goes back to DNR OMM
- Investigate fee structures (implemented annual or incremental basis), more transparency regarding what fees are collected and how distributed
- DNR has a permitting problem, staffing issue – takes too much time
- Reclamation – lots of opportunity for outdoor recreation, buffer zones that benefit conservation
- Fracking concerns – need staff to investigate many unkept wells already, regulatory is not in place
- Regarding legislation on fracking – there should be a local authority, local voice in decisions/permits – need more local input than county level
- Phone calls to OMM do not get answered – need some designated staff to focus on this issue throughout DNR – no direct customer service
- Reclamation as habitat and outdoor learning and tourism – ex: Pyramid – opportunities to see short-eared owls, connect with wine trail and other tourism industry, consider guided tours through partnerships with Audubon showing benefits
- Reclamation benefits are hidden secret – offer field days, teach public about conservation cover crops, teach about water issues
- Has DNR voiced/pollled public on extractive resource use on public lands – public prefers recreation uses to extraction
- Education, Education, Education – let public know how reclamation happens
- Recreational uses should be a priority for DNR on reclaimed lands
- DNR still practicing rules of 50 years ago – review/re-evaluate permits/land uses
- DNR reclamation lands – be a model for removal of invasives, use local ecotypes and local sources for restoration

- Mining companies need big numbers of plants for reclamation – use of state nurseries? – partner with industry to get Union County nursery open at Trail of Tears – good jobs
- Market is growing for natives – could nurseries be used to provide sources and education on natives
- Set up reclamations as seed sources – sponsor seed collections, provide seed to partners/public
- Not-for-profits can help with seed collection days
- Need for jobs and skill development – ex: Forest Preserve District of Kane County training veterans to do restoration, helping with their emotional/psychological recovery – could DNR fund or assist with a statewide program at DNR sites?

Resource Harvest –

- DNR needs more CPOs
- Review landowner agreements to address liability issues, encourage more access (i.e. hunt/fish covered but other recreation users are not)
- Foster better partnerships to participate in taking care of resources – Friends groups, user groups
- Reinvigorate fish hatchery/tree nursery model – Indiana good model
- Take advantage of existing facilities – contract with other businesses/contractors to use facility, ex: could green industry run nursery
- Invite neighboring states with successful product offerings to a meeting to share ideas – what are they doing with hatcheries/nurseries
- Arcane conservation laws – ex: illegal to take mussel shells – great for education, educational for kids to collect and learn – DNR and Dept of Ag laws contradict – DNR says can't collect salamanders, Ag says ok to possess so many for bait
- Alienating constituents from nature through laws – every few years, could DNR survey public on applicability of laws – make effort to get public input on conservation laws
- Hunting deer is a good example of supportive invasives removal – promote this, educate
- Are population studies happening? Concern about bobwhite quail – population plummeting – should we slow hunt – partner with agriculture to increase habitat
- Think of fees for ALL users – ex: public loved the duck stamp, many people bought even if not hunting as collectible, consider frog stamp or bird stamp that is beautiful – a series, have a contest for kids
- Bring back the Natural Heritage buttons –very popular – charge for them – bet public would pay \$15 for those
- Consider modern technology – what do people “collect” on-line, could DNR offer some collectible this way

- License plates – tell public where money is going, public buys special DNR plates to support recreation or habitat, etc. – want to be sure money is used in this way
- Re: Sustainability Bill – fix safety issues first, beyond that – remember that the country is changing in demographics – need bi-lingual signs – current research shows that non-English speakers do not understand that public lands are theirs, too

Resource Protection –

- More education/programs by professionals about natural areas and threatened and endangered species – seems too secret
- Support Volunteer Stewardship Network
- DNR has lost too many Natural Heritage staff – need biologists on the ground – constituents connect with people – get structural staff in place
- In southern Illinois, we know landowners who want to protect their lands – not enough biologists to help – they have too many counties and cannot get to land protection priorities
- If superintendents are hired, they should be required to have a biology background
- Species surveys – graduate students at SIU want to help, trained botanists who need service hours
- DNR should consider development of something like i-Naturalist for invasives, threatened and endangered species, bug ID – DNR should be leader/help develop/encourage/support nature education for public

Access/Outreach –

- Need professional, dedicated volunteer coordinator statewide with regional support coordinators
- Increase presence of agency to potential recruits and partners – job fairs, volunteer fairs, trade/product shows
- Federal government - ideas can be submitted on a website forum; IDNR should always be accepting ideas
- Open Visitors Centers when public is available – adjust hours and days based on visitors – public recreates on Saturday and Sunday – DNR employees should be present when public is there for education value and safety – revisit when these centers paid for with public dollars are open to public – weekend days and later hours
- Friends groups want to help, use Americorps, rectify union roadblocks and accept help
- Use Dixon Spring Ag Center as model – they recently sponsored sustainable living workshop and thousands of people attended – DNR should support public conservation education – ex: propagating native ecosystems

- Improve customer service to public; get staff at the parks
- DNR should be providing technical assistance workshops at sites – how to...control invasives, find birds, plant a prairie, etc.
- Long-term habitat restoration requires local buy-in; local education is mandatory
- Tourism – DNR is the economic engine for communities surrounding state parks - have a presence where parks are located
- Engaging public – DNR has no family oriented programs; ex: Imagination Grove at Funk’s Grove – encourage folks to interact with nature; make it fun; need DNR professionals to promote, invite; what is the barrier to taking families out?
- How does DNR decide where interpreters should be? Make this a priority
- Park superintendents should be skilled at public interaction, nature interpretation, recreation, sciences – they should be present when the public is at sites – not welcoming
- Conservation/Education/Restoration – all one – put it on billboards – campaigns with messages, ex: an invasive – what to look for on the land
- Youth – increasing interest in parks and natural areas; trail apps – Vital Lands scan code for interpretation on trails; Shawnee Forest – photo contest with GPS coordinates provided so that kids/families could go find the location where the photo was taken – interactive, promotes getting outside
- Connect with hospitals – connect out of doors with wellness; ex: doctors give patients a “pass for play” including ideas of where to go in the outdoors with DNR support
- Walking “passes” with ideas for where to walk in the region
- Think of different user groups – draw geo-cachers – require permits/ monitor use
- How about invasive species “geo-cache” – turn it into positive – go see infested areas, go see restored areas

Building Bridges –

- Volunteers, staff, and labor unions at the table to figure out how to better protect and care for our parks and natural resources
- Enhance volunteer website
- Increase outreach to youth groups
- Recruit volunteers to help with building database of interested groups, user groups want to help DNR
- Links on DNR website to other reputable outdoor rec/science/natural resource websites that are approved

- Use technology more for young people; ex: DNR should develop forum and promote to schools, etc. where DNR experts pose questions and ask kids to solve – could ask kids for assistance in development
- Do “DNR days” at schools – focus on invasives or IL reptiles or prescribed burning/restoration
- DNR should develop and promote certification programs as education – ex: Nat’l Wildlife Federation’s lawn as habitat certification
- Consider creative apps similar to NRCS soil types maps – extend to DNR resources, ability to find your local DNR parks/trails/resource people through app
- Vital Lands hike app – DNR should participate and create interpretation for most special trails with natural and cultural history, could incorporate art – DNR virtual interpretation
- Ex: art in nature – Shoal Creek Natural Area has Model T in ravine – teach about uses of land – incorporate cultural education with natural education
- Winter months – DNR biologists and park employees should go to schools during slower times; get staff into communities and schools; must come from high up in agency that this is important – face to face contact with constituents – message should be that it is ok to close a Visitors Center if you go to a school or community event – public has no idea what staff is doing – who is doing outreach?
- More funding for invasive strike teams; is DNR noticing that increase in severe weather events is causing increase in invasives spread
- Use of fire as management tool should increase at state sites; educate the public about the benefits of fire